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The night of light.

A Hanukkah play.





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The Night of Light

A HANUKAH PLAY

BY
LOUIS KAPLAN



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CAST OF CHARACTERS.

SAMUEL ROTHBAUM: the Father.

PAULINE ROTHBAUM: his Wife.

HENRIETTA ROTHBAUM: }
JOSEPH ROTHBAUM: } their Children.

HENRY HASSBURG: Mrs. Rothbaum's Brother.

ESTHER HASSBURG: his Wife.

GERTRUDE WOLFSTEIN: }
MORRIS WOLFSTEIN: } Mr. Hassburg's Cousins.

STAGE SETTING.

The sitting room in a Jewish home on the first evening of the Feast of Hanukah. In the center of the room stands a table, at which are seated a boy of eight and a girl of ten intently gazing into books before them. Near the table is a rocking chair occupied by the children's mother, who is reading a book. In one corner of the room stands a smaller table with a samovar and tea-cups, while in another corner is the candelabrum holding the Hanukah candles ready to be lit. On the walls are hung pictures of prominent Jewish characters. A number of chairs and other usual furniture are also found in the room.

The house in which the room is located is in the neighborhood of a Jewish synagogue.

The Night of Light.

JOSEPH: (*who has looked up from his book as curtain rises*): This is certainly a great book! It has pictures of giants and soldiers and all kinds of big men! I wonder if there was a time when the world was full of great men and soldiers. If there was, I wish I had been living then to see them instead of having to look at pictures of them.

HENRIETTA: (*who has also looked up from her book*): That's all you boys think about, great men and soldiers! You talk of them all day and I guess you dream of nothing else at night. That's why you never know your lessons at school. It would be a great deal better for you if you thought less of those horrible giants and cruel soldiers and more of your lessons.

JOSEPH: Well, what do you think about that! She talks as though she never spends her time reading about such things and looking at picture-books. (*Goes over to her and snatches her book*). The idea! Here she is, looking at a book of fairy-tales and sleeping beauties, and then she scolds me for doing the same thing. That's just the way with girls, they

always expect us boys to do things they don't do themselves.

HENRIETTA: Anyway, sleeping beauties and fairies don't kill people like your wicked old giants and soldiers do. Do they, mama?

MRS. ROTHBAUM: No, indeed, my dear. But neither one of you is entirely right. There have been good fairies and bad ones, great soldiers and wicked ones.

JOSEPH: Well, I never heard of the good fairies or the wicked soldiers.

HENRIETTA: You don't want to, that's why.

MRS. ROTHBAUM: Come, come, children, you must not quarrel about this. You are both right in some ways and wrong in others. We have had both great men and good women. We need only to look at our Bible to find such good women as Ruth, Esther, and others; and in the same place, we learn of such great men as Moses, and Abraham, and Joseph. (*Joseph smiles and nods teasingly at Henrietta*) Then there is that great soldier in the Bible to whom we owe this Feast of Hanukkah, which we are celebrating to-night. Can you tell me his name, Joseph?

HENRIETTA: (*while Joseph hesitates*): He doesn't know the name because it isn't found in his picture book. (*She turns her face towards Joseph and sneers*).

JOSEPH: I do so know it. His name was David.

HENRIETTA: (*mockingly, and pointing at Joseph*):

Listen to that! David, he says! He thinks because David killed a giant he did everything else in the Bible!

MRS. ROTHBAUM: Now, Henrietta, it isn't nice for you to tease your brother like that. You must remember that he is not as old as you are and shouldn't be expected to know as much. (*Turns to Joseph*) No, my dear, it was not David, but Judas Maccabeus. When papa comes home from Shul I am going to have him tell you the story of Judas, and I am sure you will find it as interesting as any giant or soldier story you ever read.

JOSEPH: (*turning to Henrietta*): Don't think I'm going to let you hear the story when papa tells it. (*Turns to his mother*) When's papa coming home?

MRS. ROTHBAUM: (*looks at her watch*): Papa will be home very soon now, as services should be over in a little while. (*From without is heard in muffled tones the playing of an organ and the singing of a hymn.*) Ah, they are singing the Hanukah hymn at Shul now. Come here, my dears, and let us be still and listen to the beautiful song which they are singing.

(*Joseph and Henrietta leave the table and take places at the sides of their mother. All sit still and listen until the hymn is finished.*) (*A beautiful and inspiring effect may be obtained here by having an organ play behind the scenes and a number of voices softly singing the Hanukah hymn to the old, traditional tune. The music should be just faint enough to give*

the idea of the strains coming from the neighboring synagogue.)

JOSEPH: (*as music ceases*): What did you call that song, mama?

MRS. ROTHBAUM: I said it was the Hanukah hymn, dear.

JOSEPH: What does all that mean? (*Henrietta laughs and covers her face with her hands.*)

MRS. ROTHBAUM: Henrietta, you must not make fun of Joseph that way. (*Turns to Joseph*) Well, a hymn is a song that is used in praying to God, and, therefore, this would be a Hanukah song to God. The word Hanukah is used here because this song is sung every year on this holiday, and because it speaks of the great victory which Judas Maccabeus won for Israel and thanks God for the help he gave Judas at that time.

JOSEPH: Who was Judas, and what did he do?

MRS. ROTHBAUM: As soon as papa comes home I am going to have him tell you the whole story.

HENRIETTA: Aren't we going to light the Hanukah candles first? You promised me we would.

MRS. ROTHBAUM: Yes, dear, papa will also do that as soon as he comes. (*A ringing or knocking is heard at the door*) There he is now, Henrietta! Run and open the door for him. (*Henrietta quickly leaves the room, while Mrs. Rothbaum and Joseph get up and move towards the door.*)

JOSEPH: (*jumping up and down on the floor as*

papa's voice is heard) : Hurrah, hurrah, for papa! I'm glad he's home!

(Mr. Rothbaum enters, leading Henrietta by the hand. Joseph runs to his father's side and takes hold of his arm.)

MR. ROTHBAUM : *(smiling and looking at Mrs. Rothbaum)* : Hello, mama! Good Yomtof! *(Mr. and Mrs. Rothbaum exchange greetings)* These children are holding on to me so tightly that I can scarcely move.

MRS. ROTHBAUM : And they won't let you go until you promise to light the Hanukah lights for them. They've been waiting for you to do it. Then Joseph wants you to tell us the story of Judas Maccabeus.

MR. ROTHBAUM : Well, I'll be glad to please both of them and quickly, too. First we'll light the candles. *(Walks toward the candle-holder)* Let go my hands and arms for a few minutes, children, and watch and listen while I light the Hanukah lights.

(Joseph and Henrietta gaze intently while Mr. Rothbaum prepares to kindle the lights.)

MR. ROTHBAUM : *(lighting the candles)* : "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, Who hast sanctified us by Thy law, and commanded us to kindle the light of Hanukah. Amen."

(As he finishes Joseph and Henrietta clap their hands and jump up and down excitedly.)

HENRIETTA : Isn't that pretty! I hope papa does it every night of Hanukah. I wonder if Joseph can count the candles!

JOSEPH: Sure I can, but I am going to count them to myself. (*Mr. and Mrs. Rothbaum look at Henrietta and laugh.*)

HENRIETTA: (*to Joseph*): Then you won't have anybody to tell you that you're wrong.

MRS. ROTHBAUM: Come, come, children! That will do! Hanukah is a time for happiness, not for quarrelling. Now papa is going to tell you the story of Judas. (*There is a knocking, or ringing, at the door*) Run, Henrietta, and see who's there!

MR. ROTHBAUM: Aunt Esther and Uncle Henry said they would be over, so I suppose it is they who are at the door. They were in Shul, too, and would have come right over with me, but Esther insisted on standing in Shul and talking to everybody, so I told them I wouldn't wait. My, but she can talk!

(*Henrietta enters, leading Mrs. Hassburg by one hand and Mr. Hassburg by the other. Joseph runs up to them and is kissed by Mr. and Mrs. Hassburg. Then the older folks exchange greetings very warmly, each one bidding the other a hearty "Good Yomtof."*)

MRS. ROTHBAUM: Take off your hats and coats and come and sit down. Here, Henrietta, put these wraps away. (*Henrietta takes them out of the room and returns. Folks all take seats in various parts of the room.*)

MR. ROTHBAUM: So you really finished talking, Esther. What's the matter, did they want to close up the Shul? (*Men laugh heartily.*)

MRS. HASSBURG: I am never in such a hurry to get away from Shul as you are. You men can hardly wait until the services are over before you get up and rush out.

MR. HASSBURG: They do that so that the women don't get a chance to talk them to death after services, my dear. (*Men laugh heartily again.*)

MRS. ROTHBAUM: You men seem well able to do your share of talking just now. (*Turns to Mrs. Hassburg*) Were there many in Shul this evening, Esther?

MRS. HASSBURG: Yes, quite a large number. Mr. and Mrs. Weil were there, and Mr. and Mrs. Solomon, Mr. and Mrs. Aaron. (*These should be given slowly and deliberately. It is well to substitute for the names given here the names of prominent members of the Jewish community in which the performance is being given.*)

MR. HASSBURG: There, there, Esther, don't start to name them all or we'll have to spend the whole Hanukah week here. (*All laugh, except Mrs. Hassburg.*)

MRS. HASSBURG: (*impatiently*): You men have to criticise all the time, and you think your interruptions are clever. (*Turns to Mrs. Rothbaum again*) Yes, dear, there was a large crowd there and—

MR. ROTHBAUM: Here comes the story of how they were all dressed, eh Esther? Another week of Hanukah. (*Men laugh and look at Mrs. Hassburg.*)

MRS. ROTHBAUM: Well, we women keep our eyes as well as our ears open in Shul. (*Women laugh.*)

JOSEPH: Why do you keep your eyes open in Shul, mama? (*Men look at each other and smile*) Don't the men do that, too?

MRS. HASSBURG: Sometimes they do, Joseph.

MR. HASSBURG: Well, it's not so much a question of keeping your eyes open as it is what your open eyes are looking at all the time. We men look at our prayer books and the rabbi, but the women usually look at other women and the clothes they wear. And it keeps them busy, too, don't it, papa? (*Mr. Rothbaum nods and both men laugh.*)

HENRIETTA: Anyway, the women can always tell what's going on around them. Mama always knows everything that happens in every part of the Shul, (*aside and lower*) except when she is bothered keeping Joseph quiet. (*All smile except Joseph, who pouts and looks crossly at Henrietta.*)

MRS. ROTHBAUM: That's all right, Joseph. You're generally a very good boy. (*Strokes his head*) I think its about time now for papa to tell the story of Judas as he promised the children he would. Let us all be quiet now except him. Come, papa, tell us the good old story as you are so well able.

(*Children take their places at papa's sides or on small chairs before him. Others draw their chairs a little closer and prepare to listen.*)

MR. ROTHBAUM: Well, once upon a time—

JOSEPH: Sounds just like a giant story!

HENRIETTA: Or a fairy tale!

MR. HASSBURG: Ha, ha, they're watching you closely, papa!

MRS. HASSBURG: Be quiet, Henry! You are as bad as the children with your interruptions.

MR. ROTHBAUM: (*laughing, and looking at Mr. Hassburg*): It seems I'm not the only person who's being watched, Henry. (*Looking at the children again*) But, to get back to the story. I am going to tell it in as few words as I can, and Joseph and Henrietta can read it some day for themselves in their Bible-story books.

HENRIETTA: But Joseph wouldn't understand it even if he could read it!

JOSEPH: I could so. Anyway, I may not read it!

MR. ROTHBAUM: There, there, children, be still. Well, there was once a large and strong country of soldiers (*Joseph smiles broadly*) known as the Syrians. They were not Jews and did not like the Jews. More than that, they ordered every Jew to give up his religion and pray to the Syrian gods. For a while it looked as though the Jews would have to do this or die, but there rose up among the Jews a band of men under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, who gathered together a very small army and fought the Syrians. Although there were many time more Syrians than Jews, Judas and his men won the fight and took the Temple in Jerusalem from the Syrians.

who had taken it away from the Jewish people. Judas cleaned the Temple and re-lit the lights which the Jews always kept burning when they had the Temple. Now, in honor of Judas and his victory, and the help which God gave them to win over larger numbers, we celebrate this Feast of Hanukah, or Feast of Lights, and light the candles in our homes just as Judas lit them in the Temple years and years ago. There is the story as short as I can make it.

JOSEPH: My, what great men! I'll bet they could whip giants!

HENRIETTA: Gracious, will he never stop thinking about them?

JOSEPH: (*seemingly unmindful of the interruption*): Was Judas as great as David, papa?

MR. ROTHBAUM: Yes, I guess he was.

JOSEPH: Were the Sy-Syrians (*Says this hesitatingly*) as big as the giant David killed?

MR. HASSBURG: (*smiling*): Why, my boy, they were bigger than that. They were almost as big as your father. (*Folks look at Mr. Rothbaum and laugh.*)

MR. ROTHBAUM: But they weren't as brave. (*Folks now look at Henry and laugh.*)

MRS. ROTHBAUM: (*sighing*): Those men are as bad as children. I guess their throats must be rather dry now as they have done considerable talking, so I'll just pour tea for all. (*Goes over to the samovar and fills tea-cups*) (*Meanwhile talks to children*) Now, children, you know the story and you can under-

stand why they sang that beautiful song which we heard from the Shul this evening.

MRS. HASSBURG: I'm glad you were able to hear it, for the singing did sound very pretty to-night. Everybody seemed to be so happy and cheerful, and it made their singing so hearty and good. As usual, Cousins Gertrude and Morris led the singing and their voices could be heard far above the rest. (*To mama*) Did I tell you that I saw both of them after services and they told me they were coming over here this evening. I thought they would be here before this.

MRS. ROTHBAUM: (*as she passes tea around*): No, you did not tell me. But I do hope they will come. I always like to see them and have them sing for us and the children.

MR. HASSBURG: Aunt Esther did so much talking after services this evening that she couldn't be expected to remember much of it. It's a good thing to send messages with women, especially if you care to have them delivered on time, eh papa?

MR. ROTHBAUM: Looks that way, doesn't it? (*Men laugh heartily.*)

MRS. ROTHBAUM: Never mind, we'll be glad enough to have Cousins Gertrude and Morris without any previous announcement. (*Knocking, or ringing, is heard at the door*) Run, Henrietta, and open the door. I suppose it is Gertrude and Morris. (*Henrietta leaves room*) We'll have a regular little family party before

it's all over. It's just the way I like to spend Hanukah eve.

(Henrietta comes in leading Gertrude and Morris Wolfstein. Joseph runs forward to greet them and is kissed by each of them. Older folks exchange greeting warmly as before, and bid each other "Good Yomtof.")

MRS. ROTHBAUM: Take off your wraps and sit down. You are just in time to join us in a cup of tea.

(Gertrude and Morris remove wraps, which Henrietta puts away. Cousins then sit down and Mrs. Rothbaum gives them each a cup of tea.)

GERTRUDE: You all look happy. What have you been doing this evening, Joseph?

JOSEPH: *(as though he did not hear the question)*: You just missed a great soldier story! Papa just told us about Dav—, I mean Judas! *(Stands before Gertrude while saying this.)*

GERTRUDE: Now, that's too bad, Joseph. But some other time I'll come here and let you tell me the story yourself.

HENRIETTA: *(aside)*: As if he could!

MORRIS: I'll listen to it, too, Joseph, if you can remember it until we are ready to hear it.

MRS. ROTHBAUM: We did our share of listening to-night, for Joseph, Henrietta and I could hear you singing the Hanukah hymn in Shul and we certainly did enjoy it. But, of course, on account of the distance, we could not hear as well as we should have

liked. I think that since the children have been told the story of Hanukah, Cousins Gertrude and Morris might now sing the Hanukah hymn for us and the children. I am sure we would all enjoy it. That's one tune that becomes more inspiring every time it's sung. Come, Gertrude and Morris, and do your part.

GERTRUDE: (*scowling*): Oh, I don't—

MR. ROTHBAUM: You can't say no. I've done my part (*throws out his chest*) and you must do yours.

MR. HASSBURG: We won't spoil your voices by listening.

MRS. HASSBURG: But you'll spoil your own voice if you keep on making remarks.

MRS. ROTHBAUM: You and Morris start it, Gertrude, and the rest of the folks will join in. I think that's fair.

MORRIS: Come on, Gerty, there'll be a family quarrel here if we don't do something at once. Then we surely want to please the children and help to make their Hanukah eve a happy one. (*To the others*) We'll be glad to have you sing along, too. It does me good to see the family together like this and we'll all sing our song of praise to God for permitting us to spend so contentedly this joyful evening of Hanukah.

(*The traditional Hanukah Hymn should here be sung, Morris and Gertrude leading the singing and the others joining in. The ancient hymn or some modern arrangement or adaptation of it will be found in any Jewish hymnal.*)

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(The hymn should be sung with enthusiasm and freedom, as a reflection of the good cheer and happiness which is prevalent in the Jewish home on Hanukah eve. Whenever convenient, it would be well to have the singing accompanied by instrumental music of some kind, preferably a piano or organ.)

(Curtain falls as singers are finishing the last line of the hymn.)

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